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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ANKARA 000050

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [TU](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKEY: ERDOGAN SUPPORTS SINIORA IN LEBANON, BUT  
TURKEY MORE INTERESTED IN STABILITY

REF: 06 ANKARA 6722

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice Weiner for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Although PM Erdogan and Lebanese PM Siniora reportedly speak often and, according to remarks in the press attributed to iniora, "have had a visible chemistry together," it seems the GOT prefers to support "stability" in Lebanon above all else. Erdogan met with most Lebanese political leaders during his one-day visit there January 3 and came away more pessimistic about the prospects for solving the ongoing political crisis. Despite Turkey's fears of regional instability, however, the GOT seems unlikely to step up to the plate and unilaterally assume a mediating role. END SUMMARY

[1](#)2. (C) MFA Middle East Department Head Sedat Onal provided to us January 10 a synopsis of PM Erdogan's January 3 visit to Lebanon. In addition to visiting Turkish troops in southern Lebanon participating in UNIFIL, Erdogan spent the day in Beirut speaking with Prime Minister Siniora, President Lahoud, Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, the head of Hizballah's parliamentary bloc Mohammed Raad, and the leader of Lebanon's Progressive Socialist Party Walid Jumblatt. Turkish press noted Erdogan also met with Saad Hariri during a lunch hosted by Siniora. Erdogan did not meet with General Aoun but Onal said this was a scheduling issue rather than a snub.

[1](#)3. (C) Addressing post-visit media reports that intimated Siniora had asked Erdogan to take on a role as mediator in Lebanon's political crisis, Onal made clear that Erdogan's trip was not an effort at mediation, but rather a continuation of a regional swing that had earlier taken him to Tehran and Damascus. In all of Erdogan's meetings, per Onal, the PM pressed his interlocutors to be conciliatory and constructive and to prioritize the interests of the nation rather than look to narrow self-interest. Erdogan underscored the importance of "preserving the unique fabric of Lebanon," and urged all to avoid maximalist positions as well as to settle their differences through political dialogue, not in the streets.

[1](#)4. (C) According to Onal, PM Siniora expressed his appreciation for GOT support, including Turkey's decision to contribute to UNIFIL. Siniora also conveyed his continued strong support for the eventual formation of the Special Tribunal as well as for efforts by Arab League Secretary General Amr Moussa. Others listened to Erdogan but held to predictable views. Lahoud and Raad both claimed to support the establishment of the Special Tribunal but complained about aspects of the documents establishing it, saying they were "too broad" and superseded Lebanon's judicial system by too wide a margin. Onal said Jumblatt was very critical of continued Syrian interference in Lebanon's affairs and asked Turkey to press Damascus to back off. The read-out of the

meetings provided by the Turkish Embassy in Beirut characterized Nabih Berri as being "not open to compromise." Berri alluded to his own "secret" plan to resolve the deadlock but did not share details with the Turks, saying that the timing was not yet right to publicize it.

¶5. (C) With respect to what Siniora had asked of Erdogan, Onal said the GOL had asked the Turks to continue what they have been doing, i.e. press the Iranians and Syrians to stop their efforts to destabilize Lebanon. In reply, Erdogan indicated those efforts will continue. Publicly, however, Erdogan made clear that Turkey is in no position to act as a "lone mediator," but could step in "if asked by the countries of the region." Onal made clear to us that the GOT strongly supports Amr Moussa's mediation effort.

¶6. (C) COMMENT: The Turks are very anxious about instability along their borders, fearing the disintegration of Iraq and eventual military conflict between Iran and the West. The possibility of implosion in Lebanon adds to their neurosis. Onal indicated Erdogan's meetings presented a depressing view of the schisms in Lebanese politics, and he left Beirut more pessimistic about a breakthrough than he had hoped. Despite what appear to be close personal ties between Erdogan and Siniora, the GOT seems most interested in finding a political solution in Lebanon with which all parties can live. In light of the realities on the ground in Lebanon witnessed firsthand by Erdogan, the GOT does not appear to see itself as a lone mediator, nor does it see itself, at least for now, as able to be any more successful than Amr Moussa has been.

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